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ABSTRACT

This literature review begins with a look at the societal changes that have caused the widening of the definition of the school counselor's job. The need for supervision and viable options for supervision are discussed. The functions of the school counselor have broadened greatly to include clinical mental health counseling services to students as well as guidance, curriculum development, and administrative duties. Structural changes are required for the school counselor to function ethically and efficiently in the mental health arena. A system must be developed whereby a counselor is able to develop professionally. Supervision is an essential part of developing into an effective mental health counselor; however, the role of supervision in the development of school counselors has been lacking. This paper examines the switch in the school counselor role from a guidance counselor to that of a mental health counselor. A review of the literature demonstrates that clinical supervision is desired and is needed for the development of efficient school counselors. In addition, different options for providing supervision to school counselors are offered. (EMK)

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Running head: SUPERVISION OF SCHOOL COUNSELORS

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The Necessity of Providing Clinical Supervision for School Counselors

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Abstract

Supervision is an essential part of developing into an effective counselor. However, the role of supervision in the development of school counselors has been lacking at best. This paper examines the switch in the school counselor role from a guidance counselor to that of a mental health counselor. A review of the literature demonstrated that clinical supervision is desired and is needed for the development of efficient school counselors. In addition, the paper looks at some different options for providing supervision to school counselors.

The Necessity of Providing Clinical Supervision for School Counselors

In the past, the primary functions of a school counselor included providing career guidance to students and developing a curriculum as well as administrative duties. This job description has been widened due largely to changes in society. These societal changes have pushed the former definition of a school counselor to include the role of clinical mental health counselor for the students. The need for school counselors to act as mental health counselors has been documented in literature. In fact, Lockhart and Keys (1998) recently suggested that, "the time is ripe for school "guidance" counselors to redefine themselves as school "mental health" counselors"(pg. 4).

The switch to a more clinical approach is quite complicated in that the entire school counselor system was developed around the role of providing guidance to students. Therefore, in order for the school counselor to function ethically and efficiently as a clinical mental health counselor, structural changes must occur. These changes include developing a system in which school counselors are not operating as isolated entities (Peace, 1995). School counselors should have opportunity to develop professionally and to receive appropriate feedback from other counseling professionals. In order for these objectives to be met, a system must be developed whereby a counselor is able to develop professionally, is able to give and receive feedback and has the opportunity to be evaluated. These goals can be accomplished through clinical supervision of the school counselor.

This literature review begins by identifying the societal changes that have caused the widening of the definition of the school counselor's job. The following section is utilized to illustrate that school counselors desire supervision and to discuss supporting

reasons as to why supervision is imperative for school counselors. The final section of the review deals with looking at viable choices of supervision for school counselors.

Societal Changes

The statement, that societal changes have forced the widening of the definition of a school counselor's job, is a broad one. In fact, however, this statement is a theme throughout the literature regarding school counselors. In today's schools, a counselor encounters mental health problems that may previously have only been seen in a community mental health center. Lockhart and Keys (1998) identified poverty, homelessness, substance abuse, and domestic and community violence as being societal conditions that have contributed to the mental health problems of students. Media reports often illustrate the fact that sudden death, suicide, and violence are routine matters in schools (Thompson, 1995). These societal conditions impact the lives of students by resulting in an increased need for mental health counseling. A school counselor, who ignores the mental health concerns of today's student, is ignoring the reality of the lives of many students.

The reported facts translate into mental health needs in the school environment. For many students, the school counselor is quite often the only mental health professional who is able to provide assistance (Barret & Schmidt, 1986). The decline of community mental health programs has contributed to the student's need for mental health counseling (Wylie, 1992). Because of this decline, students who previously had access to community services now do not. With the number of individuals requiring counseling services on the rise and the number of services on the decline, the school counselor may be the only mental health service provider that is available to the families (Lockhart &

Keys, 1998). Even for those students who may have access to community-bases services, the school counselor may be asked to provide counseling to complement the available community services (Sutton & Page, 1994).

Research has reported that school counselors currently spend the majority of their time in counseling (Roberts & Borders, 1994). Further research has demonstrated that school counselors regularly encounter students with counseling needs (Borders & Drury, 1992). These two facts reflect the reality of the position of school counselor. A school counselor must be prepared to provide mental health counseling regardless of the level of experience or the skill level. If school counselors spend the majority of their time counseling without supervision, how is the care of the student being monitored?

Contrasting literature states that the school counselor is rarely the only human service provider who works with school children (Osborne & Collison, 1998). However, an important point is, that many providers may work with the same student in which case, the school counselor may need to act as coordinator. In the case of other providers, the school counselor may need to be educated on how to integrate the different services and how to monitor effective integration of the services.

The Need for Supervision

After documenting the need for school counselors to act in the role of mental health professionals, the next step is to examine supervision and the need for school counselors to receive supervision. Clinical supervision has been described as an essential part of professional training which ensures that skills and knowledge are passed to the next generation (Bernard & Goodyear, 1992). This description reveals that supervision is necessary for a profession to build upon itself instead of constantly struggling to learn

what seasoned professionals already know. Supervision provides a method for the information to pass to the next generation of professionals.

Early authors verbalized the lack of supervision that is available to school counselors by utilizing a cactus metaphor to describe the predicament of school counselors (Boyd & Walter,1975). Boyd and Walter stated that both school counselors and cacti must survive with a minimum of nutrients. The minimum of nutrients referred to the lack of supervision available to school counselors. This concern reflected the belief that supervision is valuable to the professional development of counselors.

What benefit does can be gleaned from supervision? Clinical supervision spans the gap between what a counselor learns in an advanced degree program and the actual application of the learned skills to more complex cases (Sutton & Page, 1994). The assumption that basic learned skills can be applied in complex situations needs to be examined. However, this assumption is glaringly obvious in that school counselors are expected to act as seasoned professionals upon graduation.

Researchers have concluded that counselors benefit from supervision and show little growth from unsupervised experience (Wiley & Ray, 1986). In addition, Borders (1991) stated that school counselors who engage in supervised clinical experiences are more likely to make changes that result in greater effectiveness. These findings support that supervision is indeed necessary if school counselors are to provide effective mental health services. Additionally, the research begs the question of whether the profession is simply accepting the fact that school counselors are working unethically in practicing without supervision.

After documenting the benefits that supervision can provide to school counselors, the next question is whether or not school counselors recognize the need for supervision. The fact is that school counselors want and need regular supervision (Roberts & Borders, 1994). The alternative course of no supervision is detrimental to school counselors and to the students that constitute the third portion of the supervisory triad. A lack of supervision increases stress and intensifies the workload of the school counselors (Crutchfield, Price, McGarity, Pennington, Richardson, & Tsolis, 1997). In addition, school counselors who do not receive supervision become unsure of their counseling abilities which may contribute to lowering the skill level of the counselor (Peace, 1995). These findings point to the importance of supervision and lead to the question of what is the current state of supervision received by school counselors?

After completing the advanced degree, school counselors receive little clinical supervision (Kern, 1996). In fact, when school counselor supervision is discussed, the supervision is more administrative in nature and practically nonexistent in the counseling realm (Schmidt & Barret, 1983). Considering the disparity in time spent on counseling instead of administrative duties, the fact, that supervision is skewed towards the administrative end, is problematic at best. After establishing that clinical supervision is essential to the professional development of school counselors, the next phase is to look at some methods for providing supervision for school counselors.

Viable Options for Supervision of School Counselors

A review of the literature reveals that viable options are being researched for school counselors. These options include utilizing technology for supervision, group supervision and peer supervision. The sparse discussion about individual supervision

may reflect the logistical difficulty in providing the individual supervision. The time that individual supervision would involve may simply be out of the question. However, once clinical supervision for school counselors becomes a priority, creativity will be utilized in solving the logistics. For example, one documented suggestion is to utilize mentors (Henderson & Lampe, 1992). Mentor counselors would be practicing counselors who have been given supervisory training.

Other creative ways include using technological advances to provide supervision via computers. One option is to provide computer supervision through email. A recent study demonstrated that students who participated in supervision through email reported that email created a bond that allowed them to be more open in reporting their cases (Myrick & Sabella, 1995). Research into how technology can aid in delivering effective supervision to school counselors must be continued and should be considered a viable option.

Obvious benefits exist to providing clinical supervision to school counselors in a group setting. Similar to how group counseling is a time effective manner to deliver counseling services to students, group supervision is regarded as a time effective manner in which to provide supervision to school counselors (Borders, 1991). Group supervision reduces the number of supervisors that must be utilized. The group modality also provides a forum for participating counselors to develop supervisory skills through modeling. Recently, a study of group supervision of school supervisors produced positive results (Crutchfield, et. al, 1997). These results were ascertained from the positive statements of the school counselors who were involved in the study. The authors attributed the positive comments to the presence of an external facilitator. Although the

sample size was small, this study certainly gives insight into the effectiveness of group counseling for school counselors.

The option of peer supervision for school counselors has been researched and documented. The positive results of peer supervision include an increase in the responsibility of counselors in conducting self-evaluation and in promoting professional growth (Remley, Benshoff, & Mowbray, 1987). Other studies found an increase in the development of consultation and supervision skills (Benshoff, 1992). These positive results were attained through peer supervision. The process of providing supervision through peers contains limitations as well as benefits. These problems include not staying on topic and providing support at the cost of needed feedback (Runkel & Hackney, 1982). These limitations were obvious when the supervision time was not structured. Authors have dealt with this problem by providing models on how time should be spent during the peer consultation groups (Benshoff & Paisley, 1996).

A review of the literature demonstrates that the role of school counselors has evolved in recent years. These changes have led to school counselors taking on the role of mental health counselor. The role of mental health counselor is a role that requires clinical supervision. Supervision through technology, groups, or peers all represent viable manners in which supervision can be delivered to school counselors. These ways must be closely examined if a system is to be put in place whereby school counselors receive effective supervision. Each of the different manners present benefits as well as limitations to the supervision process, but none of the methods are as ineffective as no supervision at all.

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